



Validating Progress with Community-Based Research Projects

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Key Words

Validation, Forum, Canada, Workplace Engagement, Community-based Research, Trent, University, Civic Engagement, Community Engagement, Participatory Action Research

Context

University students doing normal coursework typically produce essays on a faculty-approved topic and work independently on their own timeline to the end of term. Community-Based Research Projects (CBRP) available through the Research in Human Geography course at Trent University (Canada) create different expectations. Students select a topic from a list of community-inspired projects and communicate actively with a host organization throughout that process. This presents challenges for both the students and the hosts they work with.

Questions

- How are you doing?
- What progress have you made on your project?
- Based on your self-assessment, what should you do or emphasize next?

Participants

- 24 fourth-year Geography students, working in pairs on 12 projects.

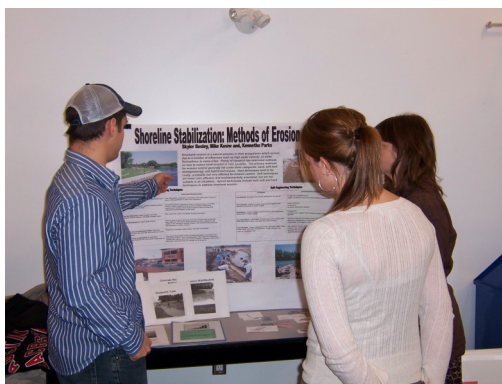


Photo: At the end of the year, students produce posters describing their projects.

Tools

Validation Tool, rating the extent to which the project has created consensus among stakeholders and the extent to which it is based on evidence (sound information and analysis), supported planning and scaling projects to meet the needs of communities and students.

Format for mid-term check-in:

1. Think about how your community-based project is progressing so far.

On a scale of 1 to 10, rate yourself in relation to the following two questions.

1 = not meeting the needs at all

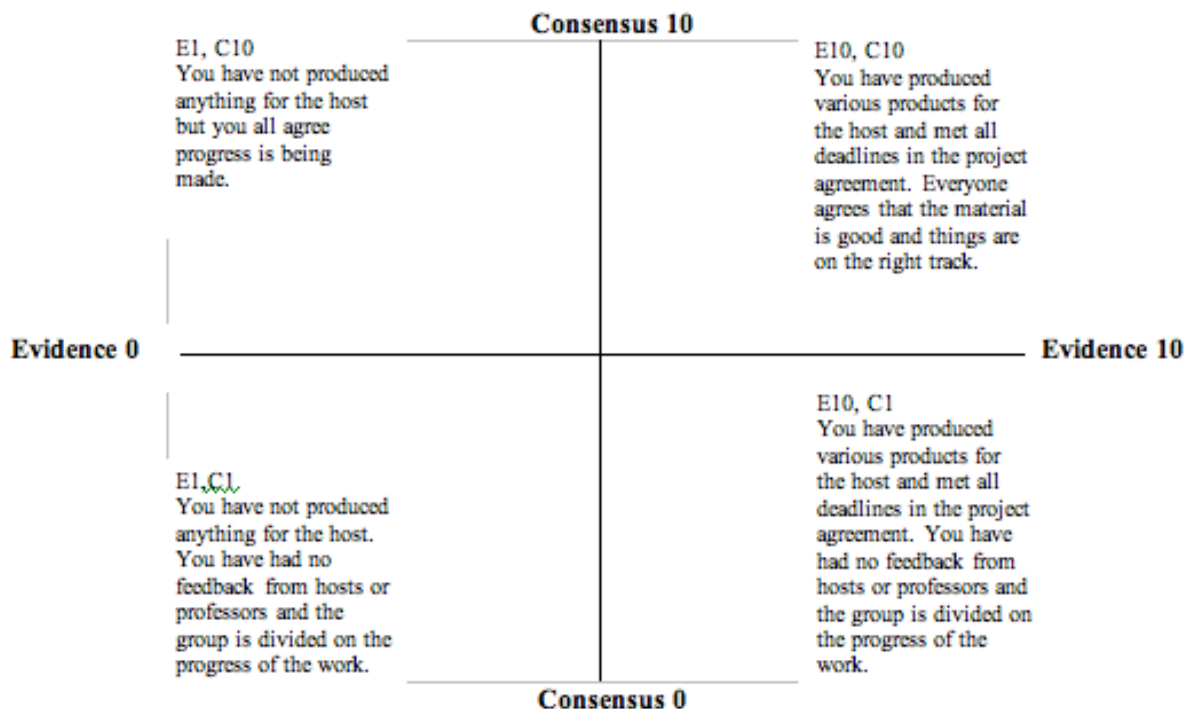
5 = doing what is necessary

10 = exceeding expectations

1. How well are you meeting the host's needs?

2. How well are you meeting your academic needs?

2. How did you come up with this assessment? How much of your assessment is based on evidence (documentation, milestones met, comparisons with the course outline, etc.)? How much of your assessment is based on consensus (you have a sense it's going well, your group agrees, e-mail correspondence, host feedback)? Consider each question and place yourself on the grid below. What are the implications of being in each quadrant?



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3. At this stage in the project, it is important to acknowledge the progress of the project. What are the implications of being in each quadrant? How does your position on the graph impact your project? Are there things you need to do to move the project along? Who needs to do those things? Identify what those are and create a plan to move forward.

Results

Most students placed themselves in the **upper right quadrant**, reporting that they were communicating well with their host and had completed a considerable portion of the project. Discussion of these projects revealed that not all in this quadrant had completed the same amount of work or had the same level of agreement with the community partner. This led to some “aha” moments as students realized they were not being entirely honest with themselves and the group about progress on their project.

Students that placed themselves in the **upper left quadrant** felt that they had good communication with their host but had not collected much information and had nothing to report on at this stage in the project. They realized that moving ahead with the project hinged on shifting to data collection as a priority.

Students that placed themselves in the **lower right quadrant** felt they were on track with the project and what needed to be done for the class but did not know whether the host would share that opinion.

None of the students placed themselves in the **lower left quadrant**. Students in an academic setting may find it difficult to share the fact that they have not made any progress on their project.

Outcomes

- By analyzing their progress, students were able to decide where their priorities should lie in weeks to come.
- Students explored data collection and group analysis methods that could be applied to each individual project.
- The technique modeled a participatory assessment process students could use in their own projects.

Contributions of SAS²

The visual approach depersonalized project assessments to some degree and allowed for open sharing of both challenges and successes. This was motivating for students.

The questions and the graphic result helped to ground discussion in specific situations. It also allowed for comparisons between projects. Using the technique combined the specific and the general.